MINISTRY TO THE RESERVISTS' FAMILIES

by

Chaplain (Maj) Louis Caputo

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The theme for the 1983 "Military Family Week" is "The Army of Excellence: A Community of Soldiers, Civilians and their Families. In a June 83 message, the Army Chief of Staff reiterates the Army's concern and interest for the soldier's families:

> "I want to encourage local commands to highlight family week with appropriate ceremonies or programs at a local level. Our Army family is comprised of active, reserve and guard soldiers and civilians, single and married, their families and of course our retired community...It is important during this week to provide time for family members to develop programs which are supportive of command goals and which provide feedback to the local commander". (1)

The Army has long realized that "no man is an island" and that the success and effectiveness of an individual is strictly connected with families' relationships and conditions. We have seen a constantly increasing list of family benefits, family programs and activities both in the military and in all walks of life.

1A Pamphlet No. 165-2 explains the U.S.Army Reserve Components Chaplaincy Program; it states: "The mission of the chaplain is to provide for the spiritual, religious and moral needs of military personnel and their families. To accomplish this mission, the chaplain's duties may include such activities as:

a. Services of worship, spiritual retreats, rites, sacraments and ordinances.

b. Religious education.

c. Pastoral care and counseling.

d. Liaison with community religious leaders, groups and welfare agencies.

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(1) Department of the Army
Headquarters, First United States Army
Fort G - Meade, Md.,
Chaplain bulletin, number 6 and 7, July and August 1983, p. 1

e. Staff consultation on matters pertaining to religion and morals. (2)

1A PAM 165-2 specifically applies to the Reserve Component Chaplains what FM 16-5 describes for the United States Army Chaplains. The Chief of Chaplains' GOALS AND OBJECTIVES - FY 1985-1986 restates the same doctrine and principles as they appear in the six Total Chaplaincy Goals:

"I - The Human Goal - A total Army which: 1) insures the free exercise of religion for all soldiers; 2) affirms and supports the worth of the individual soldier; and 3) Promotes and strengthens marriage and family life and welfare of the single soldier." (3)

"III - The Future Development Goal - A total Chaplaincy which is prepared to meet the future requirements of ministry to soldiers, their families and authorized Department of Army civilians." (4)

Given the peculiar nature of the Reserve Components, full time civilians and part time soldiers, it may be very easy to completely ignore the families of the reservists. Chaplain (Maj) Donald M. Bohn's article in the Military Chaplains' Review, "Dependents of Reserve Personnel: A Forgotten People", acknowledges the fact that "neglect of dependents is seen in all aspects of reserve activity, including chaplain concerns". (5)

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(2) 1A PAM 165-2 - Paragraph 2

(3) Chief of Chaplains -
Goals and Objectives
FY 1985 - 1986
Department of the Army

(4) Ibidem.

(5) Ch. (Maj) Donald M. Bohn
"Dependents of Reserve Personnel: A Forgotten People",
Military Chaplains' Review - DA PAM 165-134
Summer 1982 - Vol. 11, N.3 - Page 72

All reserve chaplains may agree with Ch. Bohn that "ministering in the reserve area is indeed unique and difficult" and that "when one is aware of the difficulties of ministering to reservists, one easily realizes how much more difficult and limited the ministry to their dependents would be". (6) Chaplains are expected to minister to the reservists' families as part of their mission and yet little or no ministry has been offered!

The reserve chaplain may minister to the reservists' families both directly and indirectly. "Direct ministry" is meant here to be that ministry which comports a personal contact or interaction between the chaplains and a member of the reservist's family. "Indirect ministry" is considered any message, information, counseling, assistance that originates from the chaplain and reaches the reservist's family through another person or media.

The 78th Division (Training) Chaplains are of the opinion that the reservists' families who seem to take more advantage of the reserve chaplain's ministry are the "unchurched", i.e. those who do not belong to any church, (7) and the "overchurched", i.e. those who because of their close personal ties with their pastors, prefer to discuss some matters with another clergyman. (8)

DIRECT MINISTRY

Direct ministry to the reservists' families is limited and occasional, and most times it is offered only in emergency or crisis situations. This ministry may be offered in worship services, counseling sessions, formal or informal instructions, home or hospital visitations, unit or family social events, and funerals.

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(6) Ibidem.

(7) Cfr. Chaplain E. Sensenbrenner, "The Functions of an ARCOM Chaplain", Military Chaplains' Review, Spring 1975.

(8) The 78th Division (Training) Chaplains expressed this view at their training session held at Kilmer USAR Center in Edison, N. J. on Sept. 17, 1983.

a. Worship Services

Worship services are usually offered on every Sunday drill for the reserve personnel; it would be impossible to have the reservists' families attend religious services in the armories every month; individual families occasionally do participate and are most welcome. All families are invited and encouraged to attend the reservist services on occasions like Christmas parties, family awareness days, Armed Forces Day, Communion Breakfasts and alike celebrations. These are valuable opportunities to provide spiritual assistance and to make the families aware of the chaplaincy in the reserve.

The 78th Division (Training) has a long tradition of sponsoring a yearly family retreat for the chaplains and their families. This has proven beneficial to all participants. Spouses and children look forward to this yearly encounter in which informations are shared, the spirits are tempered and uplifted, "esprit de corp" is built and fellowship is treasured. In the last few years, the Chapel Activity Specialists and their families have been participating in this retreat with visible interest and satisfaction. As a result, the participating families better understand what it entails to be a reservist; they have become more supportive of the reserve program and are coping much better with the difficulties that arise from it. Similar programs could be easily planned for the various sections of a unit and their families. Commanders do encourage and support this type of family participation activity.

b. Visitations

In order to offer any effective ministry it is absolutely necessary to know the people we want to minister to; this knowledge requires personal contact, personal encounters which establish meaningful human relationships. (9)

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(9) Cfr. Chaplain P. Henderson
"Pastoral Care of the Cancer Patient and the Family",
Military Chaplains' Review, Vol. 12, No. 3, Summer 1983.

For the reserve chaplain it is almost impossible to visit the reservists' families on a regular basis; visits to homes and hospitals, however, are and remain a must. The reserve chaplain should try to visit the families on occasions of serious sickness, death, divorce, promotions, anniversaries, weddings and other extraordinary happenings in the life of a family.

In every encounter the chaplain should convey the message that he is available not only for the reservist but also for his/her family. In these visitations the reserve chaplain should be very tactful and sensitive, aware of the fact that before he can minister he must accept and be accepted on a human level; so he shares the family human feelings of sorrow or joy, perplexity or exuberance, acceptance or rejection. Only by communicating empathy, he can start a serious, meaningful dialogue.

The chaplain needs continuous information of special happenings in the reservists' families life in order to make timely pastoral calls. This is facilitated by establishing and cultivating a good rapport with the GI/SI personnel.

c. Counseling

The encounters that take place at worship services and at home and hospital visitations, prepare the background for effective counseling. All clergymen are considered and approached very often for counseling. Counseling involves the sharing of the most intimate and personal problems, and people do not open their innerselves unless they have developed a sense of real trust and confidence in the counselor. People do not select a chaplain for counseling only because he is an ordained priest, minister or rabbi, or because of his education, they do so when they discover and feel that a chaplain understands and cares; this understanding and caring are shown by "walking the extra mile", i.e. not counting the time involved and going out of one's way.

The most common cases of counseling with reserve personnel families involve marriage relationships, parent-child relationships, drugs or alcohol, grief, or plans for the future. Only a few of the counseling sessions take place at the reserve center; some take place at the home of the reservist and some even at the chaplain's church office. The reserve chaplain should be able to counsel the reservist families more so than his active army counterpart, because he is aware of the family situations in his civilian parish and aware of the stress caused by the fact that a member of the family is connected with the army. Through his counseling the chaplain tries to encourage, strengthen, correct and heal. The inner peace of the counselee, his self-esteem and sense of direction should always be present in the mind of the chaplain.

In those cases where lengthy periodic counseling sessions are needed, aware of the limitations of time and distance, rather than handling a case superficially, the chaplain should be aware of the art of making referrals. Experience seems to confirm that in many cases the reservists' families do approach the reserve chaplain for referral purposes. (10)

d. Instructions

Every priest, minister and rabbi is commissioned to preach and to teach, not only from the pulpit but also in religious education programs, committees and assemblies. The reserve chaplain is and remains an instructor; however, his opportunities for instructing families are rare. Many commanders expect the chaplain's presence and active participation in families' awareness programs. Within the past 10 years, the 78th Division (Training) chaplains have twice organized in connection with their army area schools, special programs, classes and seminars for the chaplains spouses. Both experiences were very

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(10) In 10 years of reserve service, this chaplain has experienced that in 45% of the counseling sessions with reserve personnel and their families, these have requested referrals informations.

successful; the spouses that participated were enlightened and enthused by what they learned about the reserve program, benefits, challenges and pastoral ministry. (11)

The reserve chaplain can verbally and formally instruct the families in groups at schools, retreats, or family awareness programs, individually at every encounter or visit.

INDIRECT MINISTRY

Considering the fact that the reserve components of the same unit come from different geographical areas and that duty time amounts to only 16 hours monthly, the chaplain has to plan wisely on how to invest his time and how to reach his military congregation. The reservists assigned to HHC 78th Division (Training), where I am serving, come from all over New Jersey, Pennsylvania, New York and Delaware. The situation seems to be the same in various units and especially where there is a concentration of senior NCOs and Officers. Indirect ministry seems to be the best way to extend the chaplain's efforts to his whole military congregation. The reserve chaplain can offer real and meaningful ministry to the reservists' families through the written word and by his duties, as a staff officer and as a liaison between military and civilian groups or agencies.

a. Writing

In his prophetic function, the chaplain must communicate God's message either by way of the spoken word or by way of the written word. The chaplain can reach thousands of people through the written word. The efforts placed into a newsletter or a written message have no limits insofar as the number of people and families they can influence. Most chaplains do properly and effectively use the wirtten word to express condolences, congratulations and best wishes. Only a few have tried newsletters, newspaper articles and general

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(11) These schools were planned and conducted in 1976 and 1978 at Fort Dix, N. J., under the leadership of Ch (Col) Eugene W. Beutel, then Division Chaplain.

messages. I have always been impressed and touched by the Christmas message sent by CH (Col) William Shaub to his "Friends in the Military"; every Christmas I look for his message. The 78th Division chaplains for some time have been taking turns to make sure that every issue of "The Flash", the division newspaper, contains the "chaplain's corner", an article through which one chaplain can reach all division personnel, retirees and their families. While the CASs can be occupied in personalizing some form letters of condolences, congratulations, welcome, etc., the chaplain himself should prepare a newsletter or a written message just as he prepares his Sunday sermon. A good rapport with the PAO section will facilitate the insertion of the chaplain's message in the unit's publications and maybe even the mailing of his newsletter.

Staff Officer and Minister

In force of his rank, the chaplain is a staff officer, and as such, he can minister to the needs of the families through the army's channels and structures. As a staff officer, the chaplain has the precious opportunity to interact with the commander and the staff. In this function he can tactfully bring out the concerns and interests not only of the reservists but also of their families. He can promote family awareness programs and activities, as well as propagate to the dependents those pieces of information that are pertinent to them.

It was very good to see on the first page of the First Army's Chaplain Bulletin the information on "Family Assistance Handbook for Mobilization". (12) By promulgating this and other similar booklets we serve the families, we make important information readily available to them and we prepare them for the stress of temporary or prolonged separation and the difficulties of reunion. (13)

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(12) Headquarters, First United States Army, Chaplain bulletin, July and August 1983 - Page 1.

(13) Cfr Hamilton I. McCubbin, Ph.D., "Family Adaptability: Coping With Separation and Reunion" - Military Chaplains' Review - Winter 1980 - Page 49 - 57.

Making his presence felt at staff meetings, the chaplain can add to his ministry and concern for the families the ministry and care of all officers and senior NCOs. Following the example of the "Family Assistance Handbook for Mobilization" chaplains may promote the idea of a family assistance handbook for AT, IDT and retirement.

The Chaplain As A Liaison

FM 16-5 states that "to assist in providing a complete religious ministry for the command to which assigned, it is desirable that chaplains, with the consent of their commander, as co-ordinated with G-5, contact the clergy and other leaders in nearby communities. Fostering cordial relationships with local religious representatives, leaders of allied activities, and civic organizations can open the way to opportunities for religious, social, and cultural development of military personnel". (14) AR 165-20 encourages this liaison function of the chaplain with officials in civilian churches and other religious organizations. AR 165-20 and FM 16-5 have in mind primarily the active duty chaplain; this function is even more appropriate and profitable to the reserve chaplain. While ministering in his civilian parish the reserve chaplain can interact with ministerial associations, assistantial, social and cultural agencies. In these interactions, he can enrich these groups with his knowledge of the reserve component and related needs and also better serve the needs of the reserve personnel and their families by sharing with them the wealth of information about these same groups or agencies.

Chaplain Archie T. Roberts, in his article "Military Police and Chaplains in Domestic Crises: A Unique Ministry" points out how chaplains can assist police-

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(14) FM 16-5 8 July 77 - Section 4. 2-10.

men who often have to intervene in family disputes. "We, as chaplains concerned for individuals and the military community, have a call to be a part of this development (of family crisis intervention) for the welfare of all concerned. We must look at our own involvement, the training of those who face the domestic crisis situations first hand, and the establishment of an adequate program in our community". (15)

While it is true that the direct ministry of the reserve chaplain is very much limited, it is also true that his indirect ministry has no other limits but his own imagination and creativity. The reserve chaplain should be always aware of the fact that he was called and sent to serve, and that his ministry of service is enhanced and not hindered by the fact that he is both civilian and military pastor.

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(15) Chaplain (Maj) Archie T. Roberts, Military Police and Chaplains in Domestic Crises: A Unique Ministry; Military Chaplains' Review, Spring 1975, P. 61.